

Trabajo y Tristeza—"Work and Sorrow": The Puerto Ricans of Hawaii 1900-1902

Blase Camacho Souza

INTRODUCTION

The Puerto Ricans of Hawaii are one of Hawaii's multi-ethnic groups that has had little visibility in the literature dealing with Hawaii's peoples. Continued research needs to be done to ferret out the bits and pieces of information available in documents and other primary sources. Continued work needs to be done in oral history. Acquiring information about the Puerto Ricans has been difficult due to the following factors:

- Since they were not aliens, as Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States in 1900, there are no lists of names of Puerto Ricans who came as laborers to Hawaii, as there were lists of aliens kept by consulates of other countries.
- They were not citizens of the United States until 1917; therefore, their names are not recorded on the voter registration lists prior to 1917.¹
- They are not listed on the California to Hawaii ships' passenger lists.
- News accounts of the time (late 1890s and early 1900s) in various newspapers in Puerto Rico and the continental United States give differing data regarding the number of persons who came and of circumstances surrounding the journeys.
- The misrecording of their names by sugar plantation and Hawaii school personnel resulted in incorrect spellings, with names often being given a Portuguese spelling or Anglicized.
- Birth and death dates were not always accurately recorded.

Blase Camacho Souza, former Program, Specialist for the Department of Education, directed the 1982-1983 project Boricua Hawaiiana: Puerto Ricans of Hawaii. The Hawaiian Journal of History, vol. 18 (1984).

Continued interest in the migrations of Puerto Ricans and their life in a new homeland has led to research being done in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and in the continental United States. Dr. Arturo Morales Carrion, former President of the University of Puerto Rico (1973-1977) and former Director of the Center for Puerto Rican Historical Research (1969-1973) at the same university, said, "There is a revival of interest now in the emigration to Hawaii. . . ." ² Great impetus has been given this interest by *El Centro De Estudios Puertorriqueños* (The Center for Puerto Rican Studies) in New York City. One of their early projects was to collect documents of the migrations from Puerto Rico since 1879 and to make these accessible to scholars and students.

The record shows that the Puerto Ricans who arrived here in the early 1900s found themselves a small minority on the plantations. They quickly intermingled with members of other ethnic groups. They started marrying out of their group as early as 1902, as outmarriage was an accepted practice in their motherland. ³

PUERTO RICO AND SPANISH RULE

The island is situated in the northern hemisphere in the Caribbean and is in the center of the West Indies archipelago at about latitude 18°. It is approximately 35 by 100 miles in size and has a central mountain range, La Cordillera Central. Christopher Columbus, in 1493, found a people there called Tainos, an off-shoot of the Arawak people of South America who were themselves a branch of the Guarani-Tupi family of nations. ⁴ The Tainos called their island Boriquen, but Columbus named it San Juan Bautista in honor of the heir apparent of Spain. ⁵ Later, in 1508, Juan Ponce de Leon found a beautiful bay which he named Puerto Rico. Eventually the island was called Puerto Rico and the bay and city San Juan.

Conquest and colonization brought the distribution of land among the Spanish landholders. The Tainos were mercilessly overworked and decimated by exposure to European diseases, and this indigenous population was quickly and greatly reduced so that by the end of the century it had almost vanished. Africans were then imported as slaves to work in the mines and fields. Other Europeans gradually arrived to seek their fortunes. Much intermarriage took place, so that eventually the mixture of Spanish influence, Indian, and African became the essence of the cultural roots.

Spain ruled Puerto Rico to her own advantage, giving the island's

people little opportunity for improvement and prosperity. Their dissatisfaction was transferred into action as they increasingly challenged colonial status. Finally, in February 1898, an autonomous political system was granted Puerto Rico by the Spanish government.

This autonomy was short-lived, for by April of that year the Spanish-American War had started, and on July 25 American forces occupied the island. Under the Treaty of Paris, Puerto Rico became an American territory.⁶

A NEW SOURCE OF LABOR

In the same year, 1898, Hawaii became a territory of the United States through annexation. Hawaii's sugar industry had been recruiting labor world-wide "to get enough workers, to get them cheaply, and to keep them on the plantations." In the *Planters Monthly* of 1882 appeared the statement, "The experience of sugar growing the world over goes to prove that cheap labor, which means in plain words servile labor, must be employed in order to render this enterprise successful."⁷

The Hawaiian sugar planters were looking for a new source of labor. A strike at Pioneer Mill in Lahaina, on April 4, 1900, and another at Olowalu Plantation near Lahaina, shortly thereafter, by Japanese laborers, successfully elicited some concessions from their managers. The Organic Act of 1900 which established Hawaii as a territory of the United States, also abolished the labor contract system; thus, Japanese laborers felt free to make demands for higher wages, reduced work hours, Japanese instead of white *lunas*, abolition of the docking system, and other concessions.⁸ This was the situation that the first group of Puerto Ricans to arrive in Hawaii, in December 1900, encountered when they were assigned to work at Pioneer Mill.

The Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association looked to Puerto Rico to supply new cheap labor. Circumstances seemed to lend themselves to a successful completion of this mission. Both Puerto Rico and Hawaii were new territories of the United States with delegates in Congress and with island governments run by the Americans. Thus, the way could be readily cleared for emigration to take place.

The question became a hotly debated issue in Puerto Rico between those who supported emigration as one way to solve the overpopulation problem, and those who contended that Puerto Rico needed her workers.

Charles H. Allen, newly appointed by President McKinley as Governor of Puerto Rico, reported:

In the first place, it is the privilege of every person to emigrate if he chooses to do so, either with the hope of bettering his financial condition or finding a more agreeable residence. The humblest barefoot peon in the forests of El Yunque has the same right to expatriate himself if he chooses as does the millionaire. And in the second place, the emigration of these people can do no great harm to the island. Out of a population of nearly one million not more than 5,000 to 6,000 have emigrated—scarcely one-half of 1 percent. Porto Rico has plenty of laborers and poor people generally. What the island needs is men with capital, energy and enterprise to develop its latent industries and to reclaim its sugar estates, to build factories and railroads and make this country hum with the busy sound of commerce. If these native emigrants should not return when they are needed other persons will flock in to fill their places.⁹

Newspapers of the day constantly discussed emigration. Chief among the critics was Manuel Romero Haxthausen who wrote:

To stop emigration by force is impossible since those times are behind us. We now experience complete freedom. Men with the natural desire of bettering their situation and that of their families will leave in order to accomplish those wishes. This is the case of those who are accustomed to work and are not willing to suffer from need. This cream of the crop leaves and so who stays behind? The old, the lazy and generally those who do not believe in work. As a result *Borinquen* will become a hospital of invalids where agriculture will be in jeopardy. . . . The useful laborers, the real workers should be coaxed into staying by paying them what they are being offered in foreign countries. Thus, we will be avoiding future ills and, at the same time, providing for the welfare of these sons of the homeland.¹⁰

He further describes the principal cause of emigration:

Since the times of the Spanish domination, it has been the custom to exploit the peasant, leaving him in his ignorance. There is no reason to deny it: they have been paid low wages so that others could fill their pockets and leave the land where their capital was made with the sweat of their sons. And the worker that stayed behind: anemic, squalid, barefoot and in rags. . . .

No one at that time dared to think of emigration as an escape, since emigrations were not sanctioned by the authorities. Today [1901] we still have those underfed workers, and we will continue the same practice as yesteryear of not paying the worker his miserable salary in money, but in provisions, the quality, weight and price being stipulated by the owner. Thus workers look for a place where they will be paid in gold or silver for their work. This is why they emigrate and this is why not one will be left behind.¹¹

The well-known public figures, José de Diego (1867-1918) and Luis Muñoz Rivera (1859-1916) who were both poets, journalists, and politicians, presented differing viewpoints regarding the migration of laborers to other lands. Jose de Diego's sonnet succinctly states the colonial essence of migration:

Right through here, but in opposite bands came the exotic (Northerners) laughing, and the natives go out crying.

This poetic allusion to *Guánica*, the port of debarkation of the American invasion forces during the Spanish-American War was usually the port of embarkation of the workers emigrating.

He continued:

Some American companies, in the horrendous industry of exploiting the good faith and misery of our country people, or moved consciously or unconsciously by the desire or intuition of driving the natives from their land, took thousands of unhappy peasants to Hawaii, Yucatan, and some other far country. The shipments took place through the port of *Guanica*, which through a terrible irony represented the glorious entrance of North Americans and a defeated exit for Puerto Ricans. . . .

Luis Muñoz Rivera, a political opponent of José de Diego, made this oblique declaration:

Social malaise breeds emigration, and to Hawaii, to Yucatan, to Cuba, to Santo Domingo depart the poor laborers looking for the piece of bread which Puerto Rico denies them.¹²

Conditions toward the end of the 19th Century were such that emigration provided for some an attractive alternative to remaining in the motherland. The declining coffee market, a closed tobacco market, and a sugar market with a high tariff coupled with a depressed Spanish *peso* were factors that added pressures as new colonial policies were being structured in Puerto Rico and Washington.¹³ But the hurricane *San Ciriaco* of August 8, 1899, which swept over the island causing more deaths and destruction than all other previous hurricanes combined, was the one the Hawaii emigrants remember. A record 3,369 persons died. Torrential rains caused flooding which destroyed coffee, tobacco, sugar, and fruit and vegetable crops. Many buildings and homes were flattened, and towns suffered great damage. The poor in the countryside who lived in *bohíos* (round huts made of poles and palm leaves saw what little they had completely destroyed.

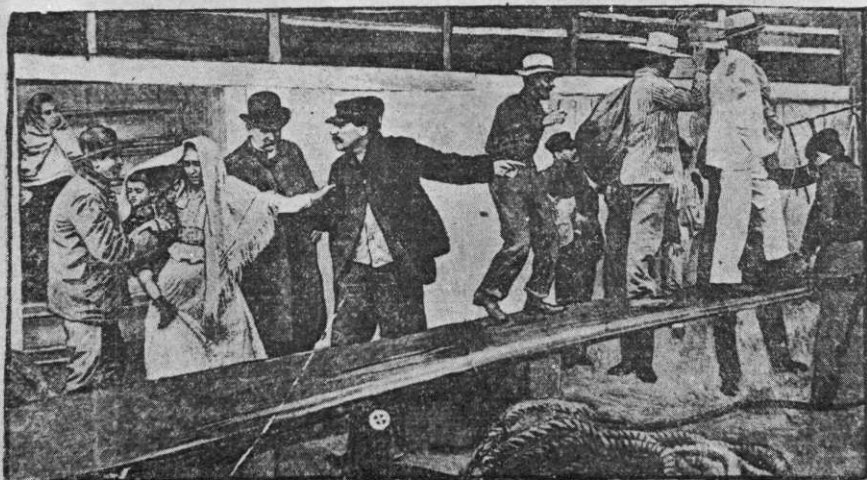
Besides no jobs, no homes, and no education, as there was no system of compulsory public education, the poor also had no money.¹⁴ Wages were extremely low. Male laborers in the city received 30¢ a day. The women received less. Maids were paid from \$3.00 to \$3.60 monthly; servant girls received \$3.60 to \$4.20. A first class cook who also did the marketing received from \$6.00 to \$7.00 monthly.¹⁵

The laborers in the rural areas were in an even more precarious position. Daily compensation for picking coffee ranged from 15 to 30 cents. Often these workers were not paid in cash, but were paid in commodities, such as codfish, or in *piches*. *Piches* was the term given to the "money" coined by the planter. The designation of the owner



THREATS AND FORCE PUT 66 PORTO RICANS ON RIO, BUT FIFTY OTHERS ESCAPE

J. S. RODMAN COLL.



IN A CHOPPY SEA OFF BLACK POINT THE PORTO RICANS WERE TRANSFERRED FROM THE CAROLINE TO THE RIO DE JANEIRO. A GANG PLANK WAS LET DOWN FROM THE STEKAGE DECK OF THE BIG OCEAN STEAMER AND LASHED TO A PLANK EXTENDING FROM THE DECK OF THE CAROLINE. UP THIS GANGWAY THE UNHAPPY PORTO RICANS WERE DRIVEN TO THE SHIP THAT IS DEPARTING THEM TO HAWAII. THE MAN UNDER WHOM A CROSS IS MARKED IN THE PICTURE IS FRANK ALAKE, WHO PILOTED THE PARTY ACROSS THE CONTINENT. HE RESISTED UNTIL THE ACT OF FORCING UP THE GANGWAY TO THE RIO A WOMAN WHO WAS UNWILLING TO GO AWAY WHO PROTESTED KNEEING. HER CHILD WAS TAKEN FROM HER ARMS. THEN SHE WENT ABOARD. THE PHOTOGRAPH WAS TAKEN FROM THE DECK OF THE CAROLINE.

was on the metal piece, which was usually tin. Therefore, a worker paid in *piches* could only make purchases at the plantation store, as these were not acceptable anywhere else. He could buy goods such as cloth at the store. He could get credit at the store that was the equivalent of his pay. Thus, what he could buy at the store was limited not only by his pay but by the goods available at the store.

Manuel Romero Haxthausem wrote on March 31, 1901:

Workers' pleas for some real money to buy meat at least once a week was denied. . . . Let's hear what Don José Rodríguez of Judiaras has to say about the lot of insistent workers. 'Remember that in order to settle accounts with the laborers on Saturday, they (the coffee growers) used to send for the Civil Guard. Nothing more can be said'. . . . Today's sugar cane landowners are paying most of the laborers 30¢ to 40¢ per day in goods as in the past.¹⁶

Times were difficult for industry also. Credit was scarce, crops depreciated in value, and the market abroad for sugar was almost nil and faced stiff tariffs.

Taxation often proved a deterrent to the worker to better his condition. For instance, if he purchased furniture of any kind he had to pay an annual tax on each piece.

Though climatic conditions in Puerto Rico are conducive to the growing of vegetables and fruits year round, gardening on the planter's land was usually not allowed. To catch the plentiful fish in the streams was oftentimes forbidden as the waters also belonged to the landowner. The worker was expected to buy most of what he ate at the planter's store.

Emigrations to other islands of the Caribbean and to Central and South America had begun around the 1870s, as day laborers and peasants sought economic betterment.¹⁷ But what made a group of people feel disposed to travel to Hawaii, an unknown place thousands of miles away? They were warned by newspaper writers of the day and others that they were going to a place that was over 2,000 miles off the coast of California; that the people were of Chinese, Portuguese, English, and American ancestry; that leprosy was rampant in Hawaii; that the sugar mills were equipped with the latest technological developments; that the workers were mainly Chinese and Japanese who could withstand the harsh climate and harsh labor; that these workers did not eat codfish, rice, and plantains, nor drink rum during working hours to replenish their energy as they did in Puerto Rico.¹⁸

FIG. 1. At San Francisco, a woman resists boarding the *City of Rio de Janeiro* in 1900 when it was to sail for Hawaii.

Nevertheless, whether or not they understood or could read what was in the newspapers, many were ready to look for a place that they thought could provide *la vida mayor*, and so they journeyed to Hawaii.

A Lieutenant Alexander of Oakland, California, and W. N. Armstrong of Honolulu represented the HSPA in investigating the acquisition of laborers.¹⁹ But best remembered by Puerto Rican elders in Hawaii was Alberto E. Minville, the son of a Puerto Rican mother and an American father who did much of the recruiting in his home area of southwestern Puerto Rico. This area was coffee-growing country, and there was extreme hardship due largely to the effect of the hurricane, *San Ciriaco*. Many emigrants to Hawaii came from this area—from districts, villages, and towns, such as Adjuntas, Aguadilla, Utuado, Lares, Arecibo, Peñuelas, Yauco, Ponce, and Mayagüez. Few came from San Juan, the largest city. Those from the city claim they were recruited by R. A. Macfie and W. D. Noble, the agents.²⁰

Whether all information was given solely orally to the first emigrants by the recruiters, or whether they had access to written information, cannot be determined at this time. The following agreement, translated into Spanish and posted, is dated April 16, 1901:

AGREEMENT FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF LABORERS FOR THE ISLANDS OF HAWAII

The Planters' Association of the Hawaiian Islands needs laborers for the cultivation of cane and the manufacture of sugar, and therefore makes the following offer to working people and their families who will go to that country:

1. To furnish such laborers, their wives, children, and relatives free passage from Porto Rico to Honolulu, including subsistence and medical attendance during the journey.

2. To furnish such laborer upon his arrival with agricultural employment for the period of three years from the date of actually commencing work; also furnishing employment to his wife and elder children if they so desire.

3. To guarantee the laborer the following wages for each month of 26 working days of actual labor:

	Per month.
During the first year	\$15
During the second year	16
During the third year	17

and to pay his wife and elder children, if they wish to work, as follows: Per day.

Boys from 15 to 18 years of age	\$0.50
Girls from 15 to 18 years of age35
Women from 18 to 40 years of age40

FIG. 2. *Trabajando*—working. Puerto Rican workers are identifiable by their light colored shirts. Their *luna* wears boots.



Sugar-cane harvesters, Hawaii.



4. The laborer and his family will receive, free of cost, living apartments, fuel and water for domestic use, medical attendance, and medicines.

5. The laborer shall be exempt from personal taxes, he and his family will enjoy the full protection of the laws of the Territory of Hawaii, and his children under 14 years of age will be provided with primary instruction in the public schools.

6. At the conclusion of three years from the time of actually beginning work the planter will pay the laborer \$72 bonus, providing always that the laborer shall have worked continually during this period upon the plantation to which he was assigned an average of not less than 20 days in each month.

Upon their arrival in Honolulu the workmen and their families will be instructed in the methods of cane culture followed upon the Hawaiian plantations.

Ten hours constitute a working day in the fields and 12 hours in the mill, it being understood that this work is not continuous, as the laborer is given time to eat his meals and rest from his work.

All overtime in excess of the hours stated will be paid for at the rate of 10 cents an hour; 26 working days constitute a month.

The journey will be made as follows: The laborers will embark upon comfortable steamers for New Orleans, a trip of 4 days; from there they will travel by rail to San Francisco, which will require about 4 days more, and from California they will embark in a Pacific liner, which will take them to Hawaii in 6 days more. The whole journey will occupy about 14 days.

The workmen and their families will be provided by the Planters' Association upon embarking with *clothing, underclothing, footwear, and blankets*, as follows:

For men and boys, 1 pair of shoes and stockings, 1 suit of underwear, 1 shirt, 1 pair of trousers, 1 hat, and 1 blanket. For women and girls, cloth for a dress and undergarments, stockings, shoes, a head cloth, and a blanket.

The climate of the Hawaiian islands is similar to that of Porto Rico, inasmuch as it lies in the 18th degree of latitude, and the temperature does not fall below 15°C. (59°F.) or rise above 25°C. (77°F) a less degree of heat than in Porto Rico.

The products of the islands are sugar, coffee, tobacco, pineapple, and all the fruits found in Porto Rico, such as bananas, yams, sweet potatoes, etc.

The inhabitants of the islands profess different religious faiths, among them the Roman Catholic, which denomination has many churches and priests there.

From cablegrams and letters received we know that the Porto Ricans, who have gone to Hawaii in the first five expeditions have been given satisfactory employment upon the plantations of the islands, as well as their wives and children. This is corroborated by letters which the emigrants have sent to their families in Porto Rico. Letters of a very satisfactory tenor have been received by several commercial establishments in Yauco for delivery to friends. These letters are on file at the Hawaiian agency, at the disposition of any who care to examine them.

Porto Rico, April 16, 1901.

R. A. Macfie, W. D. Noble

The Agents, San Jaun [sic], Ponce, Adjuntas.²¹

Hopes were high. Promises of free transportation, housing, schools, medical attention, and good wages were impressive. As Julio Montes Font put it in a letter to a friend, "As you know, I was in a sad

FIG. 3. A Puerto Rican family about 1910: father and mother, nephew and son. (Blase Camacho Souza Photos).

situation, so, I said, let me emigrate and see if I can better my situation, and that's just what I did."²² For their part, the agents felt that the people were adapted to the work, particularly since climatic conditions of the islands were similar.

Meanwhile in Hawaii, a series of meetings by the Trustees of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association set in motion plans for the recruitment, transportation, and distribution of Puerto Rican laborers among the sugar plantations.²³ At the May 11, 1900 meeting of the trustees, the President, Charles M. Cooke, and the trustees considered the report of Mr. Pepper regarding laborers from Puerto Rico. William Owen Smith reported that Colonel Davies, who had spent over a year in Puerto Rico, had urged the government in Washington to do something for the destitute natives of Puerto Rico. Because of the agitation on the Pacific coast to stop immigration of the Japanese, the trustees considered it important to get some other nationality. They decided to ask Robert Macfie, formerly of Kilauea and who had lived in Puerto Rico, to look into the matter. They were told by Francis Mills Swanzy that Macfie thought the Puerto Rican laborers would be suitable for work on Hawaiian plantations and that he would be willing to act as their agent.

At subsequent meetings the trustees voted to ask S. T. Alexander to proceed to Puerto Rico at the Association's expense to look "into the question of obtaining Puerto Rican natives as laborers for our sugar plantations." This was further expanded to the point that if Alexander thought they were suitable he was to send 600 natives, men with families and single men.

Although Alexander was the decision maker as to whether the laborers were suitable, it was E. F. Bishop of C. Brewer and Co. who "was granted full authority to negotiate all business necessary for recruitment and transportation of Puerto Rican men and their families."

Macfie reported in August that although he had already engaged 200 men and their families, the authorities in Washington had not yet given the Puerto Ricans permission to emigrate.

In November the firm of Messrs. Williams, Dimond and Co. of New York, the agent contracted to deliver the laborers, was notified that the order now was for 1,500 laborers with the possibility of an increase if the lot arrived safely and gave satisfaction.

Word of the actual shipment of 114 persons—71 men, 18 women, and 25 children that left Puerto Rico on November 22nd and were due at New Orleans on the 29th—was given to the HSPA trustees on

December 12. This group arrived in Hawaii on December 23, 1900, on the *S.S. City of Rio de Janeiro*, in numbers reduced to 56, and was sent to Lahaina.

The HSPA placed orders for various numbers of Puerto Ricans, commencing with December 24, for 1,000 men, and February 19, 1901 for an additional 1,000 men. On March 30, the HSPA asked that the order be increased to 3,500 male adults; and by June 26, gave final instructions to Messrs. Williams, Dimond and Co., to investigate the possibility of doubling the number of Puerto Ricans shipped per month, so that a total of 5,000 able-bodied male laborers might be shipped in all.

The first migration to Hawaii was concluded when the trustees approved on October 14, 1901 the action of Messrs. Williams, Dimond and Co., to discontinue Puerto Rican immigration.

The HSPA trustees' minutes also record the names of the men who accompanied the laborers at various times. Alberto E. Minville, interpreter who had accompanied the group that arrived on January 16, 1901 on the *S.S. City of Peking*, was brought to a meeting. F. J. Madura accompanied those who arrived on the *S.S. Zealandia* on February 25, 1901. Mr. Madura made two suggestions: one, that shipments be made via the Panama Canal in order that the trip be shortened, and, two, that someone be employed to go around the Hawaiian Islands to interview the Puerto Ricans, write letters for those who could not do so themselves, and send this correspondence to friends. In subsequent meetings, approval was given for hiring D. Ramon Vandrel (or Jose R. Vendrell) to write letters and articles concerning the plantations for publication in Puerto Rico. The conductor of the 10th expedition was a Mr. Casales.

Though no immigration lists have been uncovered in Hawaii to date, the following list was printed on September 6, 1901 in *El Problema* regarding the ten expeditions that had left for Hawaii.²⁴

<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of Emigrants</i>	<i>Men and Boys over 12 years of age</i>
November 22, 1900	114	77
December 26, 1900	384	202
January 24, 1901	776	384
March 3, 1901	551	342
March 26, 1901	894	394
April 24, 1901	534	234
May 21, 1901	775	390
June 14, 1901	708	469
August 12, 1901	169	125
August 29, 1901	398	252
TOTAL	5,203	2,869

An 11th and last group arrived in Hawaii on October 19, 1901.

The first group of 114 persons, described as puny and squalid, reached New Orleans on December 1, 1900 and was transferred from the S.S. *Arkadia* to two tourist cars of a Southern Pacific train which left the same night for San Francisco.²⁵

However, on December 29, 1900 the *Maui News* described them as "not really the weakly lot they were represented to be, but they were a bright intelligent looking lot of men."²⁶

What transpired between their boarding the *Arkadia* on November 22 in Puerto Rico and their arrival in Honolulu on December 23 is a fascinating tale. The reports in the *San Francisco Call* and in the *San Francisco Examiner* are a study in reporting contrasts. As set forth in the accounts in the *San Francisco Examiner* by Edward J. Livernash, and by headlines such as "Kidnaping Slaves from Puerto Rico," the tone is set. In spite of the sensational reporting, the basic facts are there. On the overland journey from New Orleans to San Francisco, there were attempts by some Puerto Ricans to abandon the train. Second thoughts about going all the way to Hawaii, about the fact that the pay was comparable or better at places en route, about the fact that there were no Spanish-speaking persons where they were going, and a dislike regarding travel conditions were causes enough for attempts on the part of some to escape. Armed guards, provided by the agent, usually prevented this. At Ontario, California, two men did escape. The trip to San Francisco was timed so that the train with its two railroad cars of Puerto Rican emigrants would arrive on the same day the S.S. *Rio de Janeiro* was to sail for Honolulu. Consequently, the trip took longer than the four days announced, for the cars were stopped and delayed at such points as the men in charge requested.

Upon reaching San Francisco, instead of being taken directly to the S.S. *Rio de Janeiro*, the Puerto Ricans were taken to Port Costa for later transfer to the ship by the small steamer, the *Caroline*. It was at this point that some escaped down the railroad track, others refused to board the *Caroline*, and still others refused to board the S.S. *Rio de Janeiro*. More than half of the group remained in San Francisco.²⁷

Because of a large storm, that first trip was a rough one, but the S.S. *Rio de Janeiro* arrived on December 23, and the laborers were boarded on the inter-island steamer, the *Lehua*, and sent to Lahaina, Maui.²⁸

Subsequent "expeditions" varied in number of persons recruited and sometimes went through Los Angeles to Honolulu. The laborers,

upon arrival in Honolulu, were assigned to the various plantations as needed and ordered.

Circumstances and conditions of each expedition varied according to the ship and captain. Some aspects were tolerable and some miserable. Food was a cause of great dissatisfaction, not only in kind and quality, but also in the way it was presented.²⁹

What did the Puerto Ricans find when they came to Hawaii? The early immigrant's answer was usually, "*trabajo y tristeza*"—work and sorrow.

First, as promised, there was work on the plantation—\$15.00 monthly for the men, 40¢ a day for the women, 50¢ a day for the boys, and 35¢ a day for the girls. Later, for the men, pay included a bonus, usually 50¢ per week if they worked a full 26-day month.

Second, there were the living quarters, access to medical aid, which varied from plantation to plantation in quantity and quality, and perquisites such as fuel and water.

Third, there was an established multi-ethnic community where language and customs were incomprehensible to them.

Fourth, there was a system of management quite different to what the workers had been accustomed, and bosses whom they could not understand and who could not understand them.

THE AFTERMATH

For the sugar planters, an important result of the Puerto Rican migration was the effect it had on the morale of the Japanese. With changes as a result of the Organic Act, and with large numbers and good organization among themselves, the Japanese were combining to strike at critical sugar planting and grinding seasons in an effort to gain better wages and other benefits. "The regular arrival of monthly expeditions of Porto Rican laboring people throughout an entire year largely disabused them of this sense of monopoly and made them much more reasonable in their relations with their employers," reported the Commissioner of Labor in 1902.³⁰

For the Puerto Ricans, the result was changing their work style, learning to communicate in another language, coping with American and other ethnic values and customs as well as with their fears and dreams, and maintaining a sense of community.

An early employment record showed that by June 30, 1901 there were already 1,772 men and 623 women (a total of 2,395) working on 40 plantations on Oahu, Maui, Hawaii, and Kauai.³¹

By February 1902, that figure was 1,851, a reduction of 544 workers, in spite of additional expeditions. On September 30, 1902, the figure was 1,853. This, according to the Commissioner of Labor, indicated that the "naturally vagrant and criminal classes were being eliminated, leaving a reasonably steady class of employees."

In the report for 1902, under General Conditions of Labor and Industry, the occupational distribution and earnings of the Puerto Ricans were reported as follows:

Of the 55 plantations in Hawaii, 34 had Porto Ricans on their pay rolls in the autumn of 1902. One thousand seven hundred men, or slightly more than 58 per cent of the whole number of men imported, were then employed, and were earning an average monthly wage, without bonus, of \$17.52. Including weekly bonus of 50 cents paid to a very large majority of them for regular work, their possible wages were nearly \$2 a month more than this, and their real monthly earnings probably averaged between \$18 and \$19. On one plantation, where the actual wages paid 54 Porto Rican employees were averaged for the month of August, 1902, it was found that they earned \$18.85 each, or 51 cents a month more than the Japanese. There were also 172 Porto Rican women employed, at an average wage of \$11.13 a month, and 164 minors, whose average wages were \$10.20. The occupations of the men were distributed as follows: Four held clerical positions, paying an average of \$35.32 a month; 11 were overseers, receiving \$30.29 a month; 18 mechanics and mechanics' helpers received \$21.57; 29 teamsters received \$20.61; 15 wharf men received \$19.77; 15 railway laborers received \$20; 9 mill hands received \$18.20; and 1,734 field hands and common laborers received, without including the bonus, an average of \$16.13 a month. The average wages of the Porto Ricans employed on the plantations are therefore higher than those promised them when they left Porto Rico. But slightly more than half of those imported still remain in plantation work. Of these 539 are accounted for by the school children, 166 had been committed to Oahu Prison, and the remaining 2,300 represent minors too young to attend school, those employed off of the plantations, and the vagrant and vagabond population that has collected in Honolulu. Some also have died and a few have left for the Coast. Twenty-three Porto Ricans are also engaged in cultivating on contracts, and are earning about \$26 a month besides quarters, fuel, and medical attendance. These are not included among the plantation wage earners enumerated above.³²

Their place in the occupation hierarchy was determined by the fact that they were not citizens of America, yet they were from an American possession. Congress had given them the designation of citizens of Puerto Rico, which meant nothing since Puerto Rico had no international status of its own. Moreover, as one sociologist put it, "They were classed as Caucasian, but most did not look Caucasian."³³ Neither were they aliens, so they did not have access to representatives from their homeland. Some turned to Dr. L. C. Alvarez, the Spanish Vice-Consul in Honolulu, regarding their difficulties, but he really could do nothing for them except give advice.

An evaluation of their work performance varied with the managers of the plantations, from the few who preferred not to have any on

their plantations, to that of the Kohala Sugar Company manager who wrote in his 1901 report, "The Porto Ricans have turned out well and are among the best laborers on the plantation, and are improving greatly." The manager of the Olaa Plantation stated that having a competent interpreter in the plantation's employ diffused misunderstanding between the laborers and the manager.³⁴

Some workers were characterized as being "footloose," moving from plantation to plantation. It did not take them long to discover that pay on each plantation was not identical, and they would look for those that paid a few cents more. Then, too, as Sebastiana Melendes (Meléndez), who had come in 1901, said at age 84, "They were always looking for a 'better condition,' maybe one plantation would give 10 minutes for the small breakfast and the other did not."³⁵

But their image suffered. Much of this was due to cultural conflict. They were measured according to the customs that were American as well as the customs of other ethnic groups in Hawaii. A case in point was bathing. The Puerto Ricans were labeled "dirty" because they did not bathe in the same manner as the Japanese. For their part, the Puerto Ricans were outraged that the Japanese would walk to the bathhouses in a state of nudity or near nudity. Their Roman Catholic upbringing demanded a completely clothed body. Sometimes this kind of conflict resulted in violence. This had to do with what they called *respeto*. An exposed body was an insult to their sensibilities, to their women and children, and maybe even a menace. Also, while they had *respeto* for their bosses in the work place and did their bidding, they expected *respeto* from their bosses where their home life and non-work place was concerned. They could not understand and would not condone the boss walking into their homes, pulling them out of a sick bed, and kicking them out. The *dignidad de la persona* was threatened, and a man had to try to retain his *machismo*, his manliness, in whatever way he could. So they fought back in the two ways they could: by the use of the tool they had, the *machete* used to cut cane, and by the practice of passive aggression, saying "yes" when they meant "no," thus gaining a reputation for being unreliable.

A large number of the Puerto Ricans who emigrated to Hawaii were *jibaros* from the mountainous country.³⁶ These *jibaros* have been described as poor, humble but proud, independent, reticent with strangers, laconic, skeptical, hospitable, and humorous.

Though their numbers were small, they gathered at joyous celebrations and in times of grief to console each other. These

occasions helped them keep alive their music, their dance, and their oral traditions. In their songs they sang of the motherland and their journey, as Nicolas C. Vegas did in his *Narración Patriótica*:³⁷

*De aquel país borincano
Tierras de tan lindas flores
De allí salimos, señores.
A este suelo hawaiano. . .*

*Nadie pensaba olvidar
Aquel amable rincón
Y por causa del ciclón
Nos tuvimos de embarcar
Y empezamos a navegar
Para distantes regiones
Afligidos corazones
Dejamos a nuestra espalda
Y de aquella tierra sana
De allí salimos, señores.*

From that Borinquen land
Lands with such beautiful flowers
From there we left, sirs,
For this Hawaiian land. . .

Nobody thought he would forget
That friendly part of the world
And because of the cyclone
We had to set sail
And we began to navigate
For distant regions
Afflicted hearts
We left behind us
And from that healthy land
From there we left, sirs.

On a daily basis they used their language, cooked their foods, and practiced their religion and other rituals that they deemed important in their lives.

Some wrote to newspapers and others in Puerto Rico complaining of the ill-treatment they received on the plantations. Others were homesick and wanted to return to the homes and the families they had left behind. They dreamed of returning home some day. Many realized that there was much good about this land and went about the business of working and starting to adapt to a totally different way of life, but at the same time maintained their cultural roots.

Their children, those born on Hawaiian soil, love the land of their birth, yet cling to part of their heritage, as this song written in the traditional *décima* style by Tanilau Dias indicates:³⁸

*Los rayos del nuevo sol
Hoy me alumbra patria mía
Vive isla de mi amor
Que es Hawaii la tierra mía.*

*Soy un pobre Hawaiiano
En la isla de Hawaii
Y el orgullo que me cae
Es ser hijo borincano. . .*

The rays of the new sun
Today shines on my land
Live on, island that I love
For Hawaii is my land.

I am a poor Hawaiian lad
On the Island of Hawaii
And the pride that falls to me
Is to be a borinquen son. . .

CONCLUSION

Descendants of the elders who came to Hawaii may be found throughout the state. Some have left for other places, with a few going to their ancestral home, Puerto Rico. Many are a mixture of ethnic strains, as the percentage of inter-racial marriage has been high throughout the years. Statistically, they are difficult to identify, for population statistics over the years did not always identify them as a separate group. How those of mixed parentage have been counted is a complex process. The following table is based on the work of Robert C. Schmitt, Eleanor C. Nordyke, and the U. S. Bureau of Census.

Population Table of Puerto Ricans

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>
1900-1901	5,200
1910	4,890
1920	5,602
1930	6,671
1940	8,296
1950	9,551
1960	Not Available
1970	Not Available
1980	19,351

The figures in the later years reflect a combination of contract laborers and their descendants, plus those persons who have come as individuals since the discontinuance of importation of contract laborers.

NOTES

- ¹ The Jones-Shafroth Act was signed by President Woodrow Wilson on March 2, 1917. After 17 years of United States occupation, the people of Puerto Rico attained American citizenship and a greater degree of self-government.
- ² Letter, Arturo Morales Carrión to Blase Camacho Souza, 31 January 1984.
- ³ Blase Camacho Souza, *BORICUA HAWAIIANA: Puerto Ricans of Hawaii, Reflections of the Past and Mirror of the Future* (Honolulu: Puerto Rican Heritage Society of Hawaii, 1983), p. 26. This is a catalog to a cultural exhibition of the same name which featured photos and costumes of the 80-years experience of the Puerto Ricans in Hawaii.
- ⁴ Federico Ribes Tovar, *A Chronological History of Puerto Rico*, trans. Anthony Rawlings and Peter Bloch (New York: Plus Ultra Educational Publishers, 1973), p. 9.
- ⁵ Ricardo E. Alegria, *Nuestros Indios*, Versión Elemental (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Colección de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 1974), pp. 11-12; Ribes Tovar, *History of Puerto Rico*, p. 13.
- ⁶ Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico: A Political and Cultural History* (New York: W. W. Norton; Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1983), p. 80.
- ⁷ Lawrence H. Fuchs, *Hawaii Pono: a Social History* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1961), pp. 206-207.
- ⁸ Ronald Takaki, *Pau Hana, Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii, 1835-1920* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), pp. 148-149.
- ⁹ The name of the island, Puerto Rico, was changed to Porto Rico by the Americans, when acquired as a territory, for "linguistic reasons," in spite of objections from geographical societies and some government agencies. Congress officially changed its original name on May 17, 1932. The report is from *Sources for the Study of Puerto Rican Migration—1879-1930*, by the History Task Force, *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños* (Research Foundation of the City University of New York, 1982), p. 14.
- ¹⁰ *Documentos de la Migración Puertorriqueña—1879-1907*, Documents of the Puerto Rican Migration No. 1 bilingual publication [of] *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños* (New York: Research Foundation of the City University of New York, 1977), p. 24.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- ¹² Luis Nieves Falcon, "Puerto Rican Migration: an Overview," *Journal of Contemporary Puerto Rican Thought*, no. 2 (1975), pp. 5-19.
- ¹³ Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico*, pp. 149-150.
- ¹⁴ Ribes Tovar, *History of Puerto Rico*, p. 341.
- ¹⁵ *Our Islands and Their People, as seen with camera and pencil* (St. Louis: N. D. Thompson Publishing Co., 1899), vol. I, 301-307.
- ¹⁶ *Documentos de la Migración Puertorriqueña*, p. 30.
- ¹⁷ *Sources for the Study of Puerto Rican Migration*, p. 2.
- ¹⁸ *Documentos de la Migración Puertorriqueña*, p. 15.
- ¹⁹ "Seek Porto Ricans for Hawaii Plantations," *PCA*, 2 August 1900.
- ²⁰ The name R. A. Macfie that appears in the "Agreement for the Employment of Laborers for the Islands of Hawaii", is recorded as Robert Macfee in the excerpts of minutes of the trustees of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association.
- ²¹ *Report of the Commissioner of Labor on Hawaii: 1902* (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1903), p. 27.

- ²² *Documentos de la Migración Puertorriqueña*, p. 34.
- ²³ Compiled by HSPA staff and made available to the writer were excerpts from Minutes of the Trustees, Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association. HSPA material following is from these Minutes:
- | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 11 May 1900 | 7 December 1900 | 28 February 1901 |
| 14 May 1900 | 12 December 1900 | 25 March 1901 |
| 21 May 1900 | 21 December 1900 | 28 March 1901 |
| 15 June 1900 | 24 December 1900 | 30 March 1901 |
| 25 June 1900 | 16 January 1901 | 5 May 1901 |
| 29 June 1900 | 31 January 1901 | 26 June 1901 |
| 12 September 1900 | 19 February 1901 | 19 September 1901 |
| 28 November 1900 | 20 February 1901 | 14 October 1901 |
| 30 November 1900 | 23 February 1901 | |
- ²⁴ *Sources for the Study of Puerto Rican Migration*, p. 45.
- ²⁵ "First lot of Porto Ricans, 114 in number bound for Hawaiian sugar plantations," *Maui News*, 15 December 1900.
- ²⁶ "The Porto Ricans landed safely at Lahaina and express themselves pleased with the outlook," *Maui News*, 29 December 1900.
- ²⁷ Edward J. Livernash, "Porto Ricans Enticed from their Homes by Promises of Luxury and Wealth and Kept Prisoners by Threats of Violence," *San Francisco Examiner*, 11 December 1900; "Porto Ricans Desert Bosses: More Than Thirty Purposely Miss the Hawaiian Steamer," *San Francisco Call*, 15 December 1900.
- ²⁸ "Rio de Janeiro arrives," *PCA*, 24 December 1900.
- ²⁹ "Ship Captured by Porto Ricans: *Keauhou* Returned for Aid From Police," *PCA*, 17 January 1901.
- ³⁰ *Report of the Commissioner of Labor on Hawaii: 1902*, p. 32.
- ³¹ *Report of the Governor of the Territory of Hawaii, To The Secretary of the Interior: 1901* (Washington D. C.: GPO, 1901), pp. 65-66.
- ³² *Report of the Commissioner of Labor on Hawaii: 1902*, p. 32.
- ³³ Romanzo Adams, *The Peoples of Hawaii* (Honolulu: American Council, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1933), p. 7.
- ³⁴ *Report of the Commissioner of Labor on Hawaii: 1902*, p. 32.
- ³⁵ Personal Interview with Sebastiana Meléndez (Melendez), 16 January 1975, on Maui.
- ³⁶ Maria Teresa Babin, *The Puerto Ricans' Spirit, Their History, Life and Culture* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1971), pp. 52-59. The Indian word *jibaro* first used to describe nations, appeared in official 18th Century documents and was used to apply to peasants of Puerto Rico. Earlier dictionaries explained the word as "white Puerto Rican peasants," but today's describe it as "peasant." The word is loaded with moral and spiritual attributes that go beyond a white person or a person from the country. Numerous books and articles have been written on the subject. Babin provides an extensive list.
- ³⁷ Souza, *BORICUA HAWAIIANA*, p. 7.
- ³⁸ Excerpt from "Amor Hawaiiano" (Hawaiian Love) by Tanilau Dias with a rough translation by the writer. The word "Hawaiiano" is used here in the Spanish context.